

**ARTICLE**

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**XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON  
FOREIGN NATIONALS IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
A THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines the concept of discrimination based on Xenophobia, and its history as well as the factors that led to its growth in contemporary South Africa. Migration of people from other African countries and outside African nations has been on the increase since the end of apartheid in 1994. The increased migration also led to increasing in hostility towards immigrants, especially towards Africans from other nations, particularly West Africans but mostly Nigerians because of the perception that they are criminals and are to be attacked and deported. This study explains the political, economic and socioeconomic implications of xenophobic attacks on foreigners and the best approach to managing the huge inflow of migrants into South Africa. The study also examines the perceived role of government agents such as the police; the statements of government officials; and the opinion of leaders who offered insight into the audacity of attackers.*

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, Attack, South Africa, Threat, International Relations, Foreign Nationals

## **Introduction**

Before 1994, immigrants from other parts of Africa and beyond faced discrimination and violence in South Africa. After the attainment of majority rule in 1994, immigrants felt that the incidence of xenophobia would reduce but on the contrary, the incidence of xenophobia increased. Between 2000 and March 2008, at least 67 people died in what was identified as xenophobic attacks. In May 2008, a series of attacks left 62 people dead; 21 of those killed were South African citizens (International Organization for Migration, 2019). Between 2010 and 2017, the immigrant community in South Africa increased from 2 million people to 4 million people (SAHO, 2019). In 2015, another nationwide spike in xenophobic attacks against immigrants, in general, prompted several foreign governments to evacuate their citizens. In 2019, a study conducted by SAHO revealed that 65% of South Africans viewed immigrants as parasitic and a burden on society because they had come to take jobs and social benefits and that 63% of South Africans thought that more immigrants were involved in criminal activities than other groups (SAHO, 2019). In its attempts to overcome the divisiveness of the past and build new forms of social cohesion, the South African government embarked on an aggressive and inclusive nation-building project. One unanticipated by-product of this project has been a growth in intolerance towards outsiders, and violence against foreign citizens and African refugees. This problem has become increasingly common and communities are divided by hostility and suspicion. Following the riots and murder of other Africans in 2017, violence again broke out in 2019 (SABC, 2019).

Due to wars, unrest, economic hardships and hostilities in most African countries, some African and non-African people migrated to South Africa in search of safety and a better life. Some were denied refugee status but others from contiguous countries like Mozambique were, on technical grounds, allowed to settle in the 'bantustans' or black homelands created during the apartheid system. Unrest and civil war also drove a large number of Congolese to South Africa. Many of the Congolese became illegal migrants. Over time, the host communities began exhibiting xenophobic attitudes towards refugees such as denying them access to the primary

healthcare to which they were technically entitled. The commonly exhibited attitude of police officers against foreigners in cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban to crimes is that most of the undocumented immigrants in those cities were involved in crime despite a lack of statistical evidence to substantiate the claim. Such a misperception as well as the vulnerability of illegal immigrants led to abuse, violence and extortion (Michael, 2019). In January 1995, the immigrants from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique living in the Alexandra township were “physically assaulted for several weeks as armed gangs identified suspected undocumented migrants and marched them to police stations in an attempt to ‘clean’ the township of foreigners (Human Sciences Research Council, 2018). In September 1998, a Mozambican national and two Senegalese citizens were thrown out of a train. The assault was carried out by a group returning from a rally and the group blamed foreigners for unemployment, crime and the spread of AIDS (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

In 2000, seven foreigners were killed on the Cape Flats over five weeks in what police described as xenophobic murders possibly motivated by the fear that outsiders would claim property belonging to locals. In the last week of 2005 and the first week of 2006, at least, four people, including two Zimbabweans, died in the Olievenhoutbosch settlement after foreigners were blamed for the death of a local man. Shacks belonging to foreigners were set ablaze and locals demanded that police remove all immigrants from the area. Attacks on foreign nationals increased markedly in late 2007 and it is believed that there were, at least, a dozen attacks between January and May 2008. The most severe incident occurred on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 2008, when two Somali shop owners were murdered in the Eastern Cape towns of Jeffreys Bay and East London (Human Sciences Research Council, 2018). In March 2008, seven people were killed including Zimbabweans, Pakistanis and a Somali national after their shops and shacks were set ablaze in Atteridgeville near Pretoria it resulted in the death of several people and hundreds were injured. This tragic incident prompted the voluntary deportation of immigrants to their home countries and the destruction of immigrant-owned properties. In 2015, another widely documented series of

xenophobic attacks occurred in South Africa, mostly against migrants from Zimbabwe. This followed remarks by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithinika Bhekuzulu stating that the migrants should “pack their bags and leave.” As of the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2015, 7 people had died and more than 2000 foreigners had been displaced. Following the riots and murder of other Africans in 2008 and 2015, violence again broke out in 2019 (SAHO, 2019).

The economic and political challenges in most African countries are predominantly the major causes of migration to South Africa in search of greener pastures. According to Evans (2009), the negative effects of apartheid which did not support the development of the human capacity of black South Africans did not prepare them adequately to hold jobs. As a result of their incapability, foreigners have been found more suitable for employment. This has resulted in agitation and frustration for the indigenous South Africans who have then resorted to violence to settle the score.

So, the focus of this study is the negative implications of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa. Migration has its cultural, political, and economic challenges but has huge negative effects on international relations. This study interrogates the danger of using violence to address issues that require policy changes in the country (Haffajee, 2019).

In addition, this study examines the causes of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals, the impact of such attacks on South Africans, and the implications on the relationship between South Africa and other African countries, as well as with non-African countries. The study also investigated the seriousness of xenophobic attacks on victims and the reactions and interventions by government/role players.

### **Conceptual Framework/Literature Review on Xenophobia in South Africa**

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definitions of xenophobia include deep-rooted fear towards foreigners and “fear of the unfamiliar.” In ancient Greece, the terms that underlie the word xenophobia, literally means “stranger fearing.” Xenophobia, an elegant-sounding name for an aversion

to persons unfamiliar, ultimately derives from two Greek terms *xenos* which can be translated as either “stranger” or “guest,” and *phobos*, which means either “fear” or “flight.” *Phobos* is the ultimate source of all English-phobia terms but many of those were coined in English or New Latin using the combining form -phobia (which is traceable to *phobos*). Xenophobia itself came through New Latin and first appeared in print in English in the late 19th century (*Webster Dictionary*). Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. Xenophobia can involve perceptions of an in-group or toward an out-group and can manifest itself in suspicion of the activities of others, and a desire to eliminate their presence to secure a presumed purity and may relate to a fear of losing national, ethnic or racial identity. Xenophobia can also be exhibited in the form of an “uncritical exaltation of another culture” in which a culture is ascribed “an unreal, stereotyped and exotic quality”. According to UNESCO, the terms xenophobia and racism often overlap but differ in how the latter is generally centred on prejudice based on physical characteristics while the former encompasses behaviour based on the notion of a specified people being averse to the culture or nation (Michael, 2019).

In South Africa, xenophobia existed in both the apartheid and post-apartheid era. Hostility between the British and Boers exacerbated by the Second Boer War led to rebellion by poor Afrikaners who looted British-owned shops. South Africa also passed numerous acts intended to keep out Indians, such as the Immigrants Regulation Act of 1913, which provided for the exclusion of “undesirables”, a group of people that included Indians. This effectively halted Indian immigration (Michael, 2019). The Township Franchise Ordinance of 1924 was intended to “deprive Indians of the municipal franchise.” Xenophobic attitudes toward the Chinese have also been obvious, sometimes in the form of robberies or hijackings, and a hate speech case in 2018 was put to court and a year later 11 offenders were put on trial. In 1994 and 1995, gangs of armed youth destroyed the homes of foreign nationals living in Johannesburg, demanding that the police should repatriate them to their home countries (Human Sciences Research Council, 2018). In 2008, a widely documented spate of xenophobic attacks occurred

in Johannesburg. It is estimated that tens of thousands of migrants were displaced; and property, businesses and homes were widely looted. The death toll after the attack stood at 56. In 2015, another widely documented series of xenophobic attacks occurred in South Africa, mostly against migrant Zimbabweans. This followed remarks by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithinika Bhekuzulu stating that the migrants should “pack their bags and leave.” As of 20<sup>th</sup> April 2015, 7 people had died and more than 2000 foreigners had been displaced. Following the riots and series the murder of other Africans from 2008 and 2015, violence again broke out in 2019 (SABC, 2019).

### **Xenophobia in South Africa before and after 1994**

According to the Southern African Migration Project, between 1984 and 1992 estimated 50,000 to 350,000 Mozambicans fled to South Africa. They were not granted refugee status but were technically allowed to settle in the Bantustans or black homelands created during the apartheid era. However, the reality was varied, with the homeland of Lebowa outrightly banning Mozambican settlers while Gazankulu welcomed the refugees with support in the form of land and equipment. However, those in Gazankulu found themselves confined to the homeland and liable to deportation should they officially enter South Africa, and evidence exists that their hosts denied them access to economic resources (Wimmer, 1997). Furthermore, the study reveals that unrest and also civil war saw a large number of Congolese people illegally migrate to South Africa in 1993 and 1994. Subsequent studies found indications of xenophobic attitudes towards these refugees, typified by their being denied access to primary healthcare to which they were technically entitled (SAMP, 2016).

It was found that xenophobia in South Africa is perceived to have significantly increased after the election of a black majority government in 1994. The study was based on a citizens survey across member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and found South Africans expressing the harshest anti-immigrant sentiment, with some South Africans in favour of a complete ban on foreign entry and many in favour of strict limitations on the number of emigrants permitted (SADC, 2000).

In 2008, there were incidences of riots and murders of other Africans, and a widely documented spate of xenophobic attacks occurred in Johannesburg. Another incident of attacks and killing of African migrants occurred in 2015. In 2018, hate speech and xenophobic attitudes were directed against Chinese migrants in South Africa. Also in 2018, there were targeted attacks on foreign-owned businesses, including businesses owned by Nigerians, and incidences of robberies and hijackings also occurred. In 2019, violence broke out and many lives were lost just as foreign-owned businesses were torched (SABC, 2019).

### **Foreigners and the South African Police Service**

The attitude of the police officers towards foreign nationals in South African cities such as Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town was an indication of misperception that most undocumented immigrants in these cities are involved in crime, despite the lack of statistical evidence to substantiate the perception. According to analysts, such views combined with the vulnerability of illegal aliens led to abuse including violence and extortion. In March 2007, a representative of Burundian refugees in Durban; claimed that immigrants could not rely on the police for protection but instead found police mistreating them, stealing from them and making unconfirmed allegations that they sell drugs (Times Live, 2019).

### **Methodology**

This study uses a case study technique for data collection. The case study requires the collection of extended data to obtain an in-depth understanding of the entity being studied. This means that the data collected are more detailed, varied and comprehensive in nature. In this study, social units such as individuals, groups, organizations, forums, specific incidents or geographic units were investigated. . A total of fifty (50) participants were selected for this study. Data were collected from South African Police, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Select-Representatives of African States. The data collection process and observation were carried out within



three weeks. The above-focused groups were selected on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2021 from Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg and Durban, three different cities in South Africa. Data were collected by various techniques such as observation of the respondent's physical characteristics, social qualities or conduct, data reported in newspaper, court and school reports, as well as from extant literature and document analyses. In addition, data was also collected through interviews with select focus groups comprising victims of xenophobic attacks. The data was analyzed qualitatively and categorized according to research questions, cases studied and information obtained from the focus groups. It was then transcribed verbatim.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Reactions and Interventions by Government and Role Players in Addressing Xenophobic Attacks**

Some of the interviewees stated that in most townships and cities like Khutson, in Gauteng Province, various shack settlements governed by Abahlali base Mjondo, also, in KwaZulu-Natal social movements, were able to ensure that there were no violent attacks against foreigners. Respondent (14) pointed out that the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign also organized campaigns against xenophobia. The Active grassroots interventions contained the last wave of xenophobia. Respondent (20), a highly ranked South African Police Officer who was interviewed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2019 at Pretoria Central Police Station reports as follows:

...Many suspects were arrested in connection with the violence. Months after the attacks a notable number of individuals had been convicted and some were not found guilty in already concluded court cases.

The respondent (20) also stated that some of the cases had been withdrawn and some were still being heard, months after the attacks because prosecutors said that some of the accused had been convicted, and cases had been withdrawn since witnesses or complainants had left the country.

Respondent (18), a professional caregiver from a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Johannesburg was interviewed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 2019. The respondent pointed out that there were provisions of tents at a refugee camp of UNHCR in Olifantsfontein, Midrand, and Johannesburg for the xenophobia attack victims. After being housed in temporary places of safety (including police stations and community halls) for three weeks, those who fled the violence were moved into specially established temporary camps. Conditions in some camps were condemned on the grounds of location and infrastructure, highlighting their temporary nature.

The Majority of the respondents concurred that the South African government adopted a policy of quickly reintegrating refugees into the communities they originally fled and subsequently set a deadline by which refugees would be expected to return to their communities or countries of origin. After an apparent policy shift, the government vowed that there would be no forced reintegration of refugees and that the victims would not be deported, even if they were found to be illegal immigrants. According to UNHCR (2008), South Africa's President approved a request from the SAPS for the deployment of armed forces against the attacks in Gauteng. Several political parties blamed each other for the attacks. The Gauteng provincial branch of the ANC alleged that the violence was politically motivated by a "third hand" that was primarily targeting ANC for the general elections. Respondent (19) agreed with Misago (2009) that some of the politicians backed the Gauteng ANC's allegations that the anti-immigrant violence was politically motivated and targeted at ANC. One of the politicians said that the violence was being stoked primarily within hostel facilities by a third party with financial incentives.

Respondent (7) asserts that radical grassroots movements and organizations came out strongly against the 2008 xenophobic attacks calling them pogroms promoted by government and political parties. Moreover, respondent (4) argues that some had claimed that local politicians and police sanctioned the attacks. At a time, it was reported that there was a call for the closure of the Lindela Repatriation Centre which was seen as an example of the negative way the South African government treats African foreigners. In

other words Respondent (13) points out that grassroots groups like Abahlali base Mjondolo and the South African Unemployed Peoples' Movement also opposed the latest round of xenophobic attacks in South Africa.

The majority of the respondents agreed that to show concern about the incessant attacks against foreigners in South Africa, there was an anti-xenophobia walk on Mandela Day, which took place in Cape Town and other cities like Pretoria and Rustenburg. The march was a result of reports regarding a possible resurgence of xenophobic-related activity and the organising of attacks in the Western Cape, Pretoria, Cape Town and Rustenburg. Respondent (16) stated that there were secret meetings by local businessmen in townships like Khayelitsha, Philippi, Mamelodi, Alexandra, Soweto and Cape Town. Respondent (11) reported that in Gugulethu, there was a secret meeting by local businessmen discussing what to do about Somali shopkeepers. According to the report by Business Day (2010), the Anti-Eviction Campaign brought these issues to the open by organizing a series of anti-xenophobia meetings attempting to find the root causes of the attacks.

Gastrow et.al. (2015) reported after the death of Emmanuel Sithole on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2015, that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was deployed in Alexandra Township, following the publication of the images. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April of the same year, thousands of demonstrators marched through the central streets of Johannesburg to protest the spate of deadly attacks on immigrants. They sang songs denouncing xenophobia and carried banners that read: "We are all Africans" as migrant workers crowded balconies, showing their support. Moreover, respondent (5) points out that there have been international reactions towards xenophobia attacks on foreigners. According to respondent (5), the attacks were condemned by a wide variety of organizations and government leaders throughout Africa and the rest of the world.

The study reveals that all the respondents interviewed concurred that the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expressed concerns about the violence and urged the South African government to

cease the deportation of foreign nationals and allow the refugees and asylum seekers to regularize their stay in the country.

### **Seriousness and Predominance of Xenophobic Attacks around South Africa**

Human Rights Watch (1998) reported that immigrants from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique living in the Alexandra township were “physically assaulted over a period of several weeks in January 1995 as armed gangs identified suspected undocumented migrants and marched them to the police station in an attempt to ‘clean’ the township of foreigners.” The campaign, known as “Buyelekhaya” (go back home), blamed foreigners for crimes, unemployment and sexual attacks. In September 1998, a Mozambican national and two Senegalese citizens were thrown out of a train. The assault was carried out by a group returning from a rally that blamed foreigners for unemployment, crime and the spread of AIDS. Respondent (19), a police investigator interviewed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2019 reports:

.... in the year 2000, seven foreigners were killed on the Cape flats over a five-week period in what police described as xenophobic murders possibly motivated by the fear that outsiders would claim property belonging to locals.

The majority of respondents interviewed, agreed that in October 2001, residents of the Zandspruit informal settlement gave Zimbabwean citizens ten days to leave the area. When the foreigners failed to leave voluntarily, they were forcefully evicted and their shacks were burned down and looted. Community members said they were angry that Zimbabweans were employed whilst locals remained jobless and blamed the foreigners for several crimes. No injury was reported among the affected Zimbabweans

Respondent (21) states that in the last week of 2005 and the first week of 2006, at least four people, including two Zimbabweans died in the Olievenhoutbosch settlement after foreigners were blamed for the death of a local man. Shacks belonging to foreigners were set ablaze and locals demanded that police remove all immigrants from the area. Respondents

(23) reveal that in August 2006, Somali refugees appealed for protection after 21 Somali traders were killed in July of that year and 26 more in August. The immigrants believed that the murders were motivated by xenophobia, although police rejected the assertion of a concerted campaign to drive Somali traders out of townships in the Western Cape.

Respondent (2), a notable caregiver that takes care of victims in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town, revealed that attacks on foreign nationals increased markedly in late 2007 and it is believed that there were, at least, a dozen attacks between January and May 2008. The most severe incident occurred on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2008 when two Somali shop owners were murdered in the Eastern Cape towns of Jeffrey Bay and East London. In March 2008, seven people were killed including Zimbabweans, Pakistanis and a Somali national after their shops and shacks were set ablaze in Atteridgeville near Pretoria. The incident led to the death of many people, several others being injured, the voluntary deportation of immigrants to their home countries, and the destruction of immigrant-owned property. According to respondent (1):

...on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, a series of riots started in the township of Alexandra (in the north-eastern part of Johannesburg) when locals attacked migrants from Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, killing two people and injuring 40 others”.

Respondent (25) reveals that during the incidence of xenophobia attacks on foreigners, some of the attackers were singing Jacob Zuma’s campaign song *Umshini Wami* (Zulu: “Bring Me My Machine Gun”). In the following weeks, violence spread, first, to other settlements in the Gauteng Province, then to the coastal cities of Durban and Cape Town. Attacks were also reported in parts of the Southern Cape, Mpumalanga, the North West and Free State.

*BBC News* (2015), reported that on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 2013, 25-year-old Abdi Nasir Mahmoud Good was stoned to death. The violence was captured on a mobile phone and shared on the Internet. Three Somali shopkeepers

were also killed in June 2013 and the Somali Government requested the South African authorities should do more to protect Somali nationals. Among those murdered were two brothers who were allegedly hacked to death. The attacks led to public outcry and worldwide protests by the Somali diaspora in Cape Town, London and Minneapolis. The reports also revealed that on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, a Somali national, in his 50s, was reportedly stoned to death and two others were seriously injured when an angry mob of locals attacked their shop in Extension 6 on Saturday evening. Three more Somalis were wounded by gunshots and their shops were looted. After another round of xenophobic violence against Somali entrepreneurs in April 2015, Somalia's government announced that it would evacuate its citizens from South Africa. It was gathered that in April 2015, there was an upsurge in xenophobic attacks throughout the country. The attacks started in Durban and spread to Johannesburg. Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini had been accused of fuelling the attacks by saying that foreigners should "go back to their countries." Locals looted foreigners' shops and attacked immigrants in general, forcing hundreds to relocate to police stations across the country. The Malawian authorities subsequently began repatriating their nationals, and several other foreign governments also announced that they would evacuate their citizens. More than 300 people were arrested in connection with the attacks (*BBC News*, 2015).

Report stated that on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2015, James Oatway, a photographer from the *Sunday Times*, photographed a brutal attack on Emmanuel Sithole, a Mozambican street vendor in Alexandra Township. According to the report, Sithole died from his wounds. Four suspects were arrested within days of the publication of the photographs in the *Sunday Times* edition of 19<sup>th</sup> of April that had earlier reported the murder of Sithole, the previous day. But Sithole's name is not included in the official list of seven victims killed in the April 2015 attacks, including an Ethiopian, a Mozambican, a Bangladeshi, a Zimbabwean and three South Africans who were all killed in KwaZulu-Natal (*Sunday Times*, 2019).

In the same vein, most of the respondents revealed that in October 2015, there were sustained xenophobic attacks in Grahamstown in the

Eastern Cape. It was reported that more than 500 people were displaced and more than 300 shops and homes were looted and, in some cases, destroyed. In these attacks, Muslims were specifically targeted. The above respondents further stated that the Grahamstown xenophobic attacks took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2015, and coincided with the “Fees Must Fall” protest at Rhodes University, which lasted for several days. One of the respondents’ reports:

...the attacks were instigated by the taxi drivers’ protests, where the drivers’ were protesting over the terrible state of roads, the rise in crime and rumours of murders committed by foreigners. Their demands were that the mayor ought to do something about their grievances. Their grievances were not addressed by the mayor.

According to Jonathan and Wade (2016), it was revealed that on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2015, taxi drivers attacked Spaza shops owned by Pakistani, Somali, Bangladeshi and Ethiopian residents of Grahamstown. The taxi drivers mobilising people intending to attack and loot shops owned by foreigners. There was a rumour that foreigners were responsible for the rampant murders in town: that an “Arab man had killed and mutilated women” around town and that the police had not done anything to address these rumours. Grahamstown residents in the townships were angry at the police for not doing anything to dispel the rumours despite having been warned by the councillors that the residents might end up taking the law into their own hands. Thus, it was the rumours that incited the attacks on foreigners.

Most of the respondents agreed that there were incidences of xenophobia attacks in different areas in South Africa. According to them, in June 2016, a wave of riots hit the City of Tshwane. Although the riots were sparked by political discontent within the ANC, Somali, Pakistan and other foreign-owned shops and micro enterprises were targeted for looting and several foreigners were attacked. 40% of respondents stated that “On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2017, a large scale and officially sanctioned anti-

immigrant protest was organized and held in Pretoria. Protesters marched to the Foreign Ministry and handed a petition to government representatives. Protesters accused immigrants of taking jobs from South Africans, causing crimes, and complained that “they are arrogant and don’t know how to talk to people, especially Nigerians.” Consequently, one hundred and thirty-six (136) protesters were arrested during the march.

SAHO (2019) reported that on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019, xenophobic riots targeting African immigrants broke out in Sydenham, Jadhu Place and Overport areas of Durban. Around one hundred (100) people attacked businesses owned by foreign nationals and this led around 50 people to seek shelter in a local police station and mosque. Three people were killed in the riot.

Respondent (27), one of the representatives of migrants from Somalia argued that the speech given by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the ANC’s election manifesto for the 2019 South African general election inflamed xenophobic feelings alleging Ramaphosa announced his commitment towards cracking down on undocumented foreigners involved in criminal activities. The attacks on foreigners were criticised by both the South African government and political parties amidst calls to ensure that xenophobic sentiment was not exploited for electoral purposes.

55% of the respondents agreed that xenophobia and discriminatory speeches by some of the politicians at local, provincial and national levels were responsible for triggering xenophobia attacks in different townships and cities in South Africa. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2019, riots and looting targeting shops owned by foreign nationals broke out in Jeppestown and Johannesburg CBD following the death of a taxi driver. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, police had made 189 arrests for looting. Around 50 businesses predominantly owned by Africans from the rest of the continent were reportedly destroyed or damaged during the incident. The riots coincided with a nationwide truck driver strike protesting the employment of non-South African truckers. In September 2019, 640 Nigerians signed up to take free flights back to Nigeria amidst attacks on foreigners (SAHO, 2019).



## **The Impact of Xenophobia Attack on South Africa's Relationship with Other Africans and Non-Africans**

Most of the respondents interviewed were of the view that immigrants from other parts of Africa and beyond were faced with discrimination and violent attacks in different townships and cities of South Africa. The attacks have caused the death of about 200 people (both South Africans and foreigners), in what was identified as xenophobic attacks. Due to the recent spike in xenophobic attacks against immigrants in general, several foreign governments have started to repatriate their citizens.

McMichael (2018) asserts that in November 2009, about 1500-2500 Zimbabwean farm workers were forcibly evicted from their homes in the informal settlements of De Doorns, a grape-farming town in the Western Cape. No person was physically assaulted but homes were trashed and looted and this led to the biggest displacement of foreign nationals since May 2008. The Zimbabweans were then housed in a displaced persons' camp where some remained for a year until it was closed. McMichael (2018) identified the role of a ward councillor, Mpumelelo Lubisi, in inciting the attack in possible collusion with informal labour brokers who had financial interests in getting rid of their Zimbabwean competitors. South African workers also accused farmers of employing Zimbabweans at less than minimum wage farmers and Zimbabwean workers denied the allegations. According to McMichael:

...South Africa's borders have been militarized, this shared state-corporate project of building up a 'fortress South Africa' also reveals a deeply entrenched seam of xenophobia, in which undocumented migrants and refugees from African countries are painted as a security risk akin to terrorism and organized crime.

Most of the respondents opined that parliamentary discussions on border security are rife with claims that foreign nationals are attempting to drain social grants and economic opportunities from citizens. The portrayal of illegal immigration as a national security threat, which often relies on unsubstantiated claims about the inherent criminality of foreign nationals,

provides an official gloss on deeply entrenched governmental xenophobia, in which African immigrants are targeted for regular harassment, rounding up and extortion by the police. This normalization of immigrants as figures of resentment may also fuel outbreaks of xenophobic violence.

One year after the 2008 xenophobic attacks, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CORMSA), said that foreigners remained under threat of violence and that little had been done to address the causes of the attacks. The organization complained of a lack of accountability for those responsible for public violence, insufficient investigations into the instigators and lack of a public government inquiry (CORMSA, 2009).

### **The Causes of Xenophobic Attacks on Foreign Nationals in South Africa**

Human Sciences Research Council identified four broad causes of the violence. They include relative deprivation, specifically intense competition for jobs, commodities and housing; group processes, including psychological categorization processes that are nationalistic rather than super ordinate, South African exceptionalism, or a feeling of superiority in relation to other Africans; and exclusive citizenship, or a form of nationalism that excludes others (Human Sciences Research Council, 2018).

The International Organization for Migration found that poor service delivery or an influx of foreigners may have contributed but blamed township politics for the attacks. It was also found that community leadership was potentially lucrative for unemployed people, and that such leaders organized the attacks. Local leadership could be illegitimate and often violent when emerging from a political vacuum or fierce competition, the report said that such leaders enhanced their authority by reinforcing resentment towards foreigners (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

On the causes of xenophobic attacks on foreigners in South Africa, 70% of the respondents agreed that in some of the cities of South Africa, xenophobic attacks were instigated by taxi drivers who were protesting the terrible state of roads, the rise in crime and rumours of murders committed by foreigners.

They stated that an inquiry by the Competition Commission found that the country's anti-trust regulator had indicated that a difference in performance between foreign and local business owners has created a perception that foreigners were more successful than locals. While there is nothing wrong with examining the dynamics of competition, the insinuation that foreign business owners were to blame for the decline of South African-owned small businesses was worrying.

Gastrow (2018), in a study on the economics of small traders in South Africa, entitled "Somalinomics" outlined the trade practices of Somali traders in South Africa. The study found nothing distasteful about the business practices of foreign small traders. Rather, the foreigners adopted savvy business principles, where smallest foreign retailers set a low mark-up to make a high turnover, most foreigners; especially Somalians locate their businesses in highly trafficked pedestrians' areas. They open early and close late and have a wider product range. Foreigners adopted customer-focused business practices that make them different from their South African counterparts. Furthermore, Gastrow's report found that Somali retailers invest considerable efforts into sourcing low prices for their products, using sourcing techniques like buying in bulk in order to get discounts from wholesalers. Almost all the Somali traders in the study pool their resources each month to source goods. Each retailer procures specific goods for their store individually but the costs associated with restocking, like transport and labour, are shared among themselves.

Respondent (8) states:

...most small foreign retailers set a low mark-up to make a high turnover, they locate their businesses in highly trafficked pedestrian areas, and they open early and close late and have a wider product range, due to the marketing strategy adopted by the foreigners, the South Africa counterparts are not happy with it and thus became jealous".

In this respect, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) conducted an interview with social media analyst Preetesh Sewraj who warned of the impact of fake news stories which were being used to create panic amongst South Africans and the fake news prompted attack on the foreigners in various towns and cities. According to the media report, it was revealed that Helen Zille, leader of Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition party pointed to instances of crowds of rioters singing “Umshini wami”, a song associated with then-president of the ANC Jacob Zuma, and noted that the rioters also hailed from the rank and file of the ANC Youth League. She alleged that Zuma had, years before, promised his supporters to take measures against the immigration of foreign nationals to South Africa and that Zuma’s most recent condemnation of the riots and distancing from the anti-immigration platform was not enough of a serious initiative against the participation of fellow party members in the violence. Both Zille and Sandra Botha, the parliamentary leader of the DA slammed the ANC for shifting the blame concerning the violence to a “third hand”, which is often taken in South African post-apartheid political discourse as a reference to pro-apartheid or allegedly pro-apartheid organizations.

According to report of *SABC News*, 2019, in KwaZulu-Natal province, Bheki Cele, provincial community safety minister, blamed the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a nationalist Zulu political party, for stoking and capitalizing on the violence in Durban. Both Cele and premier S’bu Ndebele claimed that IFP members had attacked a tavern that catered to Nigerian immigrants en route to a party meeting. The IFP, which is based primarily in the predominantly ethnically Zulu KwaZulu-Natal province, rejected the statements, and had engaged in an anti-xenophobia meeting with the ANC.

The study revealed that the historical culture of violence contributes to the high levels of criminality in South Africa. In some places, violence has become an acceptable means of resolving conflicts. Poverty and unemployment are contributory factors that brought increase in crime. Although poverty does not directly lead to higher crime level, rather it coalesces with socio-political and cultural conditions for an increase in growth of crime and

crucial syndicate and gang. Marginalisation of the youth, combined with the slow growth in the job market, has contributed to the creation of a large number of youth at risk (Carter, 2009). It is crucial to point out that poorly managed development itself has contributed to increase in crime rate and inadequate services to victims of crime create a negative impact on individual, family and community believing that the victim is ignored. This scenario contributed to the incidence of repeat victimisation, which led to retribution violence or perpetrators of other crime. Gender inequality, both in terms of popular attitude and the inadequate services offered by the CJS to women, contributed to the high level of violence against women. In this regard, Hutson (2007) noted that “gender discrimination in South Africa is deeply rooted in the ethnic traditions of the multi-cultural communities, as well as by the compliance of women themselves, and also each culture’s values perceive women as inferior to men. Also, many forms of prejudice, discrimination on the basis of gender can originate from a wide variety of different sources. These can include outmoded social expectations, distorted beliefs, personal senses of entitlement, and outright bigotry. The proliferation and easy accessibility to firearm is a major contributor to violent crime (Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, 2007).

### **Recommendation**

- The South African government and criminal justice officials must take a giant stand on xenophobic attacks against foreigners in South Africa, which includes immigrants from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, China and India and Mozambique amongst other countries. Most of these foreign nationals living in the cities and townships around South Africa were physically assaulted, and their businesses destroyed during xenophobic attacks in South Africa.
- It is necessary that all those that have been identified or suspected as having undocumented status in South Africa should be legalized, with the aid of their consular and embassies in South Africa.
- The National Crime Prevention Strategy (1996) reveals that the crime

level in South Africa is affected by different situations or conditions and South Africa's history has contributed to the range of factors that escalated crime in different communities of South Africa. The government of national unity inherited the entire public services including radically based, misappropriate distribution of criminal justice resources, insufficient and ill-equipped personnel combined without dated system, and fragmented department have contributed to a system that has been unable to cope with the demands created by the need to provide services to all the people of South African. Also, the political transition generated material expectations which were largely beyond the immediate delivery capacity of the new government. Therefore, there is a need for the government to tackle the situation or the condition that escalates crime in South Africa and educate the masses against blaming foreigners for their socio-economic predicaments.

- There is need to tackle conditions and situations that precipitate xenophobic attacks on foreigners. Historical culture of violence contributes to the high level of criminality in South Africa. In some places, violence has become an acceptable means of resolving conflicts. Poverty and unemployment are contributory factors that increase crime. Although poverty does not directly lead to higher crime level, rather it coalesces with socio-political and cultural conditions for an increase in growth of crime and crucial syndicate and gangs. Marginalization of the youth, combined with the slow growth in the job market, has contributed to the creation of a large number of youth at risk. It is crucial to address these conditions in order to reduce tensions that are associated with the culture of violence, as means of resolving conflicts.
- There is a need for change in attitudes of South African police officers and some of the South Africans towards foreign nationals. The perception that most undocumented immigrants in some of townships and cities are involved in crime has no statistical evidence to substantiate the perception. Therefore, such views combined with the vulnerability of illegal aliens led to abuse,

including violence and extortion. The perception needs to change and the authorities should deal with undocumented foreigners within the confines of the law.

- South African government should ensure that incidences of xenophobic attacks are kept under control and ensure that its relationship with other nations is re-established. The government must ensure that South Africa, as a nation, is environmentally friendly to be able to attract foreign investors and tourists who have branded the country as a hostile destination.

## **Conclusion**

This study has revealed that different situations or conditions, and South Africa's history have contributed to the range of factors that escalated crime and xenophobic attacks on foreigners in different communities of South Africa. The study revealed that there is no single cause of crime but searching for specific causes may lead to ineffective solution because different types of crimes have different causes. The government of national unity inherited the entire public services including radically based, misappropriate distribution of criminal justice resources. In addition, insufficient and ill-equipped personnel as well as dated system, and fragmented departments have produced a system that has been unable to cope with the demands created by the need to provide services to all the different people in South Africa.

Moreover, some of the South Africans who engaged on xenophobic attacks against foreigners have transferred their aggression onto foreign nationals and neglected the fact that the political transition generated material expectations which were largely beyond the immediate delivery capacity of the new government. This has frustrated their great expectations. Also, high and unrealised expectations associated with political transition contributed to the justification of crime. Legitimation of violence associated with political causes served to decriminalise certain categories of crime related to inter group conflict or political rivalries. Criminalisation of political activities and protest has also contributed to blurring between legitimate protest and criminal activity. All these factors contributed to the xenophobic attacks on

foreigners and their businesses. Therefore, the government of South Africa should address the root causes of xenophobic attacks against foreigners, respond swiftly, stop future occurrences, and rebuild its international reputation and relations with other nations.



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